

## **A Visit With Dwight Smith**

BY DAVID MITTELL

Early every morning, at 83, one of the greatest businessmen, historians, raconteurs and characters Duxbury has ever known arrives at his office at 553 Washington Street. He is Dwight Smith – for 52 years the principal owner of Long Point Marine.

Where to begin? Anywhere is bound to lead to a good story. Dwight Smith has so many of them this may need to be a two-part series....

Despite my inclination to address him as “sir,” Mr. Smith insists I call him “Smitty.” (He wins.) Smitty is a Mayflower descendant on both sides of his family. His father was Leslie Bradford Smith, in the line of Governor William Bradford. In the early days of the automobile, Mr. Smith senior worked at the Chevrolet dealership in Plymouth. These were the days when car components came by train, to be assembled at the dealership on Sandwich Street.

Smitty went to school in Plymouth through the 10th grade, and loved it, since at 6’ 2” he was a dominant player on the football, basketball and baseball teams. As he was entering the 11th grade, the family moved to Kingston, where the high school class had 28 students of whom just 11 were boys. Nonetheless, when he graduated in 1950, he led Kingston to the Class C basketball title.

Smitty went on to study at Wentworth Institute for two years. Northeastern University then offered him three years’ credit for his two years’ at Wentworth. Instead, he enlisted in the Air Force. This was the middle of the Korean War, which he spent as an automobile mechanic, first in Arizona and then working for the American Arabian Oil Company.

“I fought the Korean War in Arabia!” he says.

Back in Plymouth after his three-year enlistment, Smitty went to work for the Cadillac-Oldsmobile dealership there. Through his widening circle of friends and connections he heard that boatyards were classified as “interstate commerce,” and thus obliged to pay time-and-a-half for overtime. In 1957, he went to work for the Plymouth Marine Railway. This was his formal introduction to boat yards, though by no means to boats.

It was in 1961 that Smitty came to what was then the Duxbury Boat Yard, owned by Frank Davis, to do marine engine work for Mike Butler. Butler owned the Cities Service Station and Studebaker dealership at 433 Washington Street. He lovingly had the building designed to look like a Cape Cod house, not a garage. (Looking just the same, it is now the Sea School Boating & Renting.) Mike Butler was looking to succeed Eben Briggs as Duxbury’s fire chief. As he has done for many, Smitty helped him out by taking some of Butler’s marine engine work off his hands so Butler could be chief.

Investment in what would become Long Point Marine dates to 1963. Smitty says Frank Davis first asked “if I got enough money.” He found 13 possible investors, including Ross Allen, Sherborn Carter and Charles Davis of Stone & Webster – well-known and well-remembered citizens of the town.

At Long Point Marine, Smitty made lifelong friends with the men who had built the *Mya* there in 1939 and 1940. These included Russ Chandler, Mike Linde, Alva McAuliffe, Tommy Parker and Gordon Tucker.

“They were master craftsmen,” Smitty says.

Built for Dr. Hermon Carey Bumpus, Jr., the *Mya* was the largest vessel built in Duxbury in 100 years. After Dr. Bumpus’ death, she was sold to Senator Edward Kennedy, who sailed her for the rest of his own life. She remains in the Kennedy family.

The men who built *Mya* were skilled craftsmen, but not necessarily businessmen, Smitty says. Dr. Bumpus was not completely satisfied with *Mya* and took an interest in the boatyard from its owner, Bill Taylor. It was thus that it passed to Frank Davis and later Dwight Smith.

By 1967, Smitty concluded that the shares investors had bought in the yard were to their advantage more than his own. With the help of SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) he took a new, \$75,000 loan at better terms to buy out his partners.

The following year the Blizzard of 1978 did extensive damage to the yard. Smitty took a 30-year \$65,000 loan from the federal government to repair the damage to the yard. Most borrowers, he notes, took such disaster loans as free money. He likes to boast that he paid back every penny.

Like many successful people, Dwight Smith is one hundred percent catholic in his choice of friends and associates. He loves people of means who help their fellow human beings. He equally loves people of little means and honest toil. But he doesn’t like people who cheat and has a special eye for people of means who “squeeze little people.” He mentions the (former) investor who came into his office, took the key to the coke machine out of his desk and helped himself to a free soda.

“I fight city hall all the time,” Smitty says. No doubt about it! But always with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye. Today his son Judson Loring Smith works at the desk beside him. This year, for the first time since 2008, Long Point’s employees are all getting a bonus.

In midwinter Smitty escapes to Florida for a month; and at this writing he is on his way back from a drive to Mount Rushmore with the lady in his life. (“I had never seen Mount Rushmore,” he says.)

But on most days Smitty can be found at his desk early in the morning. He always has time for a guest – for whom, without fail, he always has a good story.